

THE ONE IS FORTY-FOUR.

Lofty, serene, star crowned she sits, the one
That's forty-four: light-throned and beautiful,
But with glad welcomes in her smiling eyes
For all the lowliest of God's poor, who toil
And come to make their homes with her and be
Her children.

Never more shall Tyranny
Command them to hard, unpaid toil, nor scourge
Them forth to battle in unrighteous and
Ambitious wars. Her banner shields them with
Its forty-four in one, the flag beneath
Whose folds each citizen is honored prince
Or princess of the land, and all in rule
Of their proud heritage.

Thus blossoms fair
The realm to fuller bloom and truer life
And closer fellowship, swift marching toward
The sure fulfillment of the Master's word
And thought, blest "Peace on earth, good-will
to men."
—Albert C. Hopkins.

The Great Hesper.

BY FRANK BARRETT.

CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED.

As I thus explained what had happened, a more startling reflection occurred to my mind. The thief had been disappointed in not finding the diamond beneath my pillow, but he yet might not have relinquished the hope of getting it.

He might not have left the room. He might be hidden there at that very moment!

What was more easy, being in the room, than to conceal himself in it? The curtain that masked the oriel, the great chest, the settle, the press, were all suggestive of that course. The fellow might be under the very bed—I was lying upon!

The movement I had seen in the curtain, the sound similar to the drawing of a blade from its sheath (which might well have been caused by the movement of the heavy valance of the bed), strengthened the suspicion. Was he lying there waiting for the sound of my heavy breathing to assure him that I slept?

There was scarcely the necessity to wait for that, for what resistance could I, lying upon my back there, make against a foe springing out of the dark upon me?

I thought of the clasp-knife Van Hoeck had given me, and, stretching out my hand, I felt for it where I had stuck it—between the mattress and the bedstead. I could not find it.

Pushing back the curtains so that the light from the lamp fell upon the edge of the bedstead, I assured myself that it was not where I had left it. It must have slipped through—or been drawn out.

The latter supposition explained the sound and movement I had heard and seen. Yet it might have made that sound in slipping through—its fall upon the floor deadened by the carpet, or its point sticking in the boards; but I fancied the horn-handle was too wide to allow of its slipping through.

To satisfy myself at once upon this point, I leaped out of bed, resolved to strike a match and look under the valance. I stood for a moment stupefied: the box of vestas was gone from the table where I was certain I had laid them.

They must have been taken while I lay screened by the bed curtains. I glanced over my shoulder.

The folds of the curtain against the bed were not the same as when I pushed them back to the wall: one fold stood out at an angle; and as, slowly turning around, I looked more closely, I saw against the dark oak panel of the wall, about the mid-height of a man, and protruding but an inch or so from the edge of the curtain, the bright point of a knife-blade.

Now, indeed, there was no longer any doubt. The man who had come to rob was there to murder me. Had I stopped but another moment on the bed he might have knifed me.

What was I to do? I had him standing there behind the curtain at a certain advantage.

Should I spring upon him and strangle him against the wall in the folds of the curtain?

It was not a sure victory for me, and a partial one might in the end be fatal. The thick stuff would prevent my getting a firm grip of him, and his right hand, the one that held the knife, was free. My chance was too small, the danger too great to justify that attack, though the muscles of my arms and fingers were strung up to make the tempting effort.

Keeping my eye upon the curtain I drew back to the foot of the bed. To get to the door I must cross the room, and inevitably be seen by the murderous rascal as he stood there on the inner side of the bed-curtain; and arrived at the door I must turn the key twice, and the handle as well, before he overtook me. On the other hand he had to disengage himself from the folds of the curtain and recover the start I had of him.

The chances were pretty equal, and I determined to save myself by flight rather than risk the fatal result of the unequal encounter.

I made my way noiselessly in a straight line down the room until I got opposite the door, then I made a rush for it across the open space. I got to the door, and with furious haste groped about for the key—it was gone!

I grasped the handle, in the hope that I might be able to tear the lock off; the screw had been taken out,

and the knob slid off the spindle in my hand. I was lost.

It astonishes me now to think with what celerity and adroitness these precautions against my escape had been made.

The man had not rushed after me; there was no desperate pursuit of that kind; he knew I was trapped. Only as I turned my eyes back to the place where he stood, I perceived that the light was dying out.

There was but a narrow row of blue flame above the wick; it faded away, and all was dark.

There are degrees of darkness; this seemed to me the last degree. I felt as if I was sunk in a lake of pitch.

If I called for help, it was not certain that the heavy-sleeping Judge would hear me. Possibly Sir Edmund was yet awake, but I thought of Edith, and besides I knew that before assistance could come, before the door could be burst, all would be over.

Probably my foe was already approaching me; my cry would be the signal for him to spring upon me.

No, my only chance of escape was in maintaining silence, and keeping him in ignorance of my position. If accident brought us into contact, I trusted to my physical strength and good luck to be a match for him and his knife in the subsequent struggle. The diamond buckled to my wrist might serve me in the fight; I might stun the fellow with it if fortune only favored my arm.

It was a duel between us, and any way, I would sell my life dearly.

With this resolve I drew away from the door toward that part of the room where, as I fancied, the carved press stood. I kept my arms free, my body crouched together, and every muscle tense and ready.

I backed a few feet from the door, and then I stopped, as the reflection crossed my mind that I might be backing toward my adversary! Then I regretted that I had left the door, where at least I might have stood safe from a rear attack.

I could hear nothing but the throbbing of the blood in my temples and the quick tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac of my watch behind me, yet I knew that the murderer must be moving.

He had his work to do, and must have made up his mind how to do it before putting out the light. I could see nothing, and the silence and darkness were horrible, with the possibility of his falling upon me from behind. Yet how was I to guard against that attack, not knowing where he was? Possibly his visual power was stronger than mine.

I knew by the ticking of my watch that the bed was somewhere behind me, and that I ought to be facing the oriel; and as I strained my eyes to catch any rays of light that might exist, I fancied I detected a dim gray seam in the blackness before me—possibly the curtains masking the oriel were slightly parted.

As I continued to stare in that direction, I became convinced that this was the fact, and slight though the assurance was, it gave me some feeling of security; in that direction I might know of my foe's approach. And, sure enough, at that very moment the gray seam was blocked out.

He was there, between me and the oriel. My first impulse was to end the terrible suspense, and spring forward upon him; but prudence checked me.

He might be close to me, or he might be close to the oriel—it was impossible to tell merely by the absence of a faint light. If in springing forward, I fell short of him, it would be all over with me. My force expended in the spring, he would have me at his mercy, and a short death was the only kind of mercy I had to expect. Again, what feeble light there was must fall upon me, as I faced it—an advantage for him, a terrible peril for me.

I resolved to back toward the wall at the upper end of the room, and guided still by the ticking of my watch, I drew back with the stealthy caution of a cat.

Suddenly I saw the gray seam of light again. Had he gone to the right or left? I knew not. Quickly I stretched my foot out behind me; I felt something, and for the instant thought I had touched the fellow, but, as turning about I groped my hand forward, I encountered the cold wood-work of the bedstead. It was one of the carved pillars. I drew myself up, and put my back against it. Now, at least, that dreaded stab in the back was less probable.

I am not a coward, yet I own that the terror of the following minutes thrills me now as I look back upon it. The impenetrable darkness, the silence rendered only more intense by contact with the perpetual tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac of the watch behind me, were made terrific by the awful uncertainty of my position.

I stood there waiting for the attack, until, the suspense growing intolerable, I felt that I must end it by shouting aloud to Brace, and precipitating the final struggle.

"I will wait five minutes longer,

and no more." I said to myself, resolving to calculate the space fairly, and with due allowance for false impressions. I calculated that two minutes had passed, when I fancied I heard the bed creak behind me. Was this one of the false impressions I had promised myself to guard against, or was the sound caused by the man mounting upon the bed behind me?

The hair bristled upon my head as I thought I heard the creak repeated, yet I stood there, and counted another minute, with every nerve and fibre prepared to spring away.

"Now, surely four minutes are up," I thought, and drew my head down into my shoulders, for, as surely as if my eyes had been turned that way, and the full light of the sun shining in the room, I knew that the man was behind me on the bed.

I drew a deep inspiration, resolved to shout my loudest to Brace, but before the sound had passed my lips a towel was drawn tight upon my face, and my head jerked back against the post behind me. A fold of the towel gagged me completely; it was with difficulty I breathed. I struggled, but in vain, to wrench myself away; a quick and sure hand had knotted the towel. I threw up my hands to tear the thing off; in an instant they were enveloped in the thick curtains, and though the fellow had not sufficient strength to tie them down to my side, he at least baffled my attempts to free my head. I drew my feet from the ground, hoping that my weight would drag my head from the towel; I only succeeded in drawing the knots tighter, and half strangling myself.

As I could not release my head, I got my arms down, and tried to seize the rascal's feet, but he kept them beyond my reach; yet I got something by the attempt for, in groping about, I laid my hand upon the knife which he had thrust in the bed, to have free use of his hands, the better to overcome the resistance of my arms. I should have had no hesitation in ham-stringing the rascal if I could have got at his legs, but I could not do that. I determined, if possible, to keep the knife out of his way.

I felt, by the horn handle, that it was the one that Van Hoeck had given me; and knowing the trick of the blade, I shut it up, and slipped it into my pocket.

"Now," thought I, "if only thews and sinews are concerned, we will see who can get the best of it." And, with redoubled efforts, I struggled to tear down the bed-curtains that hampered my movements; and, maddened by the difficulty of respiration, I threw such force into my efforts, that the pole upon which they hung crunched under the rings, and finally came rattling down about us. Would that the lamp had been near, to be smashed by the fall! The noise was too slight to be heard at a distance.

My left hand being free, I felt again for the knot of the towel that bound me to the post. A bony hand grasped my wrist, and dragged it over my shoulder, and the next moment I felt something pressed under my nose, and a liquid trickling through my moustache on to my lips. It had a sweet taste, and a strong smell of apples, that mounted at once to my brain. I seemed to be no longer touching the ground, but whirling round and round through space; my arms dropped by my side.

I knew that I was powerless, yet I retained a certain kind of consciousness. I was sensible that the difficulty of breathing no longer troubled me. I knew that the man was binding my arms to the post, and I remembered thinking, in the amused manner of a half-intoxicated person, what a fool he must be to bind me when I could no longer make resistance. I was perfectly conscious when he began to tie my feet to the post below, for I had then sufficiently overcome the effect of the opiate to think of resistance. I tried to struggle and to scream, but to no purpose; my will had lost all power over my muscles. And this terrible impotency reminded me of Van Hoeck's half-uttered simile:

"Cramped in a coffin, and the clouds falling—falling!"

What astonished me was the surprising facility with which the man executed his work in the darkness that then prevailed. He seemed to have no difficulty at all in finding the ends of the sheets with which he bound me, and knotting them securely. And when I was safely pinioned, he unbuckled the strap that bound the Great Hesper to my wrist, without having to seek for the tongue of the strap, as I myself might have had to do.

"Well, that's gone," I said to myself, "and now he has the diamond, he will go too."

But he had not yet finished. And, after a brief interval, during which he might have been buckling the Great Hesper upon his own wrist, I heard a sound that I knew only too well.

Click!

It was the spring that locked the long blade of my clasp knife when it was opened.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

SONS OF ADAM.

Mgr. Satolli's fad is to have singing birds all over his house.

Tobacco was so called from the West Indian island of Tobago.

The late Lord Lovelace, who died recently, had ignored all animal meat for many years.

The man who thinks the boy who lives next door to him is a good boy has not yet been found.

Mrs. Sharp—A man always makes a fool of himself for a woman. Bachelor—How? By marrying her?

Judge J. T. Dalvin, of Siloam, Ga., who has married over 150 couples, says that he never received a single fee, save a bushel of potatoes.

"Why was their engagement broken off? Did they quarrel?" "No, that was the trouble. They were both so amiable that they got tired of each other."

Waiter, to happy-looking customer—Well, sir, what is it? Happy-looking Customer, spontaneously—Boy—eight-pounder—finest in the land! Looks like me, too.

Two old slaves, John Thompson aged 85 years, and Kitty Owens, 70 years old, were married at Louisville, recently. They were lovers previous to the war, but from that time until a short time ago they had not seen each other.

William Green bears the distinction of being the greatest steeple climber in England. He has repaired fifty or more steeples and spires, and is sent for from all parts of the kingdom. His greatest achievement has been in repairing the spire of Salisbury cathedral, which is over 400 feet high.

The original of Barnaby Rudge, a man named Walter de Briscan, who was a packman or peddler by trade, recently died in Chatham, England. Dickens used to talk to him when he met him in Chatham, and was struck by his cleverness and story. He always dressed in the costume of a man of the Georgian period.

EXPLOITS OF EXPERTS.

David Christie Murray in a recent address contends that the drama is not an art but a trade. The money-making faculty is the one sign of ability.

In a new book that tells of the colors of the soul in various stages of evolution, the important information is given that blue indicates the highest attainments in perfection.

It is announced that Paris is to build, for the purpose of handling world's fair visitors in 1900, a tubular railway eight miles long, in which trains will run on two minutes' headway. Electricity will be employed for moving the trains.

Edison is now at work with a plan to grease the sides of ships, so that they will slip through the water more readily. He says the friction of salt water and its constituents are much more than is generally believed, and if he can only do what he is trying to do, the Campanian can make the voyage between New York and Liverpool in four days.

Surgery's progress was illustrated several days ago when New York doctors before removing a boy's leg cut a hole in the abdomen, big enough for one of them to thrust in his sterilized hand and pinch an artery that would be involved in the operation. But for the possibility of antiseptic treatment no such operation could be performed with safety.

President Eliot of Harvard says that there is scarcely a single subject taught nowadays in the same way it was taught thirty years ago, and that even law, the most conservative of studies, is now treated in an entirely different method from that which prevailed in former years. That method, he adds, is being adopted all over the country and is making its way into the English universities.

A new explosive cartridge, invented by Dr. Ochse, formerly with the Messrs. Krupp, is a sealed glass tube or ball containing acidulated water, into which two platinum wires are led. For use a current of electricity is sent through the wires, decomposing the water into hydrogen and oxygen. Upon the ignition of the mixed gases an explosive force of 5,800 atmospheres per square inch is developed.

LIGHT SELECTIONS.

Mrs. Harriet Condit caught a herring at Hartford, Conn., and in its back she found a lady's pin imbedded. It was set with moonstone and pearls.

Some months ago the free libraries of Sheffield, Eng., began blotting out the sporting and betting news in their newspapers. More than 20,000 readers protested, and the council has rescinded the order.

The largest increase in gold production in any state last year was in Colorado, whose increase approximates \$2,000,000. The only state in which a decrease is shown is Nevada, a falling off of about \$375,000.



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